



Review article

In search of new wars: The debate about a transformation of war

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Patrick A. Mello

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany

Abstract

Are we witnessing a transformation of war? If so, have traditional conceptions of war lost their validity and how ought they be replaced? This article addresses these questions in a review of the literature on ‘new wars’ as it evolved in Germany, Great Britain and the USA. The meta-theoretical nature of the new war proposition makes it difficult to trace an academic debate that reaches across fields, from political theory to sociology, international relations and political economy. In order to gain an overview of this heterogeneous field of research five hypotheses are derived concerning characteristics of ‘new wars’: (1) the erosion of the state’s monopoly on the use of force; (2) the political economy of ‘new wars’; (3) ‘new wars’ as asymmetric wars; (4) ‘new wars’ as identity-based wars; and (5) terrorism within the framework of ‘new wars’. The concluding section addresses critiques, provides a brief summary and proposes future research.

Keywords

asymmetric warfare, new wars, organized violence, terrorism, transformation of war

Are we witnessing a transformation of war? If so, have traditional conceptions of war lost their validity and how ought they be replaced? These are the crucial questions in the debate on ‘new wars’ since the term was introduced.¹ If recent publications are any indication, then we still lack satisfactory answers, despite significant progress in research (for example, Geis, 2006; Malešević, 2008). The meta-theoretical nature of the new war proposition makes it difficult to trace an academic debate that reaches across fields, from political theory to sociology, international relations and political economy. This review disentangles diverse strands of research to derive a set of hypotheses about the characteristics of ‘new wars’. First, a brief review of the state of empirical research is provided. The main part then analyses the ‘new war’ literature along the lines of five partially

Corresponding author:

Patrick A. Mello, Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Unter den Linden 6, 10099 Berlin, Germany.

Email: patrick.mello@sowi.hu-berlin.de

contending hypotheses, allowing for an overview on the various propositions and authors, and their respective approaches. The concluding section addresses critiques of the new war proposition and proposes future research.

Is there evidence for a transformation of war? Despite differences in the details proponents of the 'new war' thesis agree in their understanding that contemporary warfare is qualitatively and quantitatively different from previous forms of conflict and thus requires a new conceptualization (Daase, 1999; Gilbert, 2003; Kaldor, 1999; Münkler, 2002, 2006a; van Creveld, 1991). However, the empirical foundation of the new war proposition remains contested. One example is the claim concerning a dramatic increase in the ratio of civilian to military casualties when comparing the numbers for the beginning of the 20th century with those for the late 1990s, when close to 80 percent of all war deaths were civilian (Kaldor, 1999: 100; Münkler, 2006a: 216). This oft-repeated assertion, however, has been scrutinized by studies that illustrate that the numbers are misleading and partly inaccurate (Lacina and Gleditsch, 2005: 146).

Are there empirically substantiated trends concerning contemporary warfare? We know that there has been an 'unambiguous decline' in the occurrence of great power war, a continuing trend since the end of World War II (Levy et al., 2001: 17). This concurs with a significant increase in the number of internal wars, which have become the dominant form of conflict since the end of the Cold War, as several independent studies confirm (Chojnacki, 2006; Daase, 2001; Sarkees et al., 2003). For the period from 1998 to 2007 the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute lists only three major armed conflicts as fought between states, while the remaining 30 conflicts recorded for this period were all internal (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2008).² Since the latter half of the 20th century the number of wars below the threshold of inter-state war has been eight times higher than that of wars between states. This coincides with a rise in the number of war deaths and the duration of intra-state wars (Sarkees et al., 2003: 61–65). Another well-established trend concerns the geographical distribution of war: contemporary conflicts erupt predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent and South-East Asia (Chojnacki, 2006; Hewitt et al., 2008). A comprehensive look into present-day warfare also has to account for conflicts below the threshold of war: militarized interstate disputes (MIDs). A data set for 1992 to 2001 compiled by the Correlates of War project shows a mean of 32.9 MIDs per year (total of 296), with a tendency towards less intense militarized interaction than earlier periods. The findings indicate that disputes over territory are more likely to escalate and incur fatalities than those over policy goals (Ghosn et al., 2004: 142). An example for the former would be the *enduring rivalry* between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir region.

The erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of force

Hypothesis 1: (a) An essential characteristic of 'new wars' is the progressive erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of force. (b) In the wake of this process, traditional distinctions as between combatants and civilians become increasingly blurred.³

Scholars argue that 'new wars' are characterized by a progressive erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of force, which coincides with the dissolution of traditional

distinctions concerning actors, territory and international law. 'New wars' are contrasted with 'old wars', which were primarily European conflicts between the late 17th century and World War II. The age of 'old wars' is commonly connected to Carl von Clausewitz and the terminology he introduced in his seminal work *Vom Kriege* (1832). It is argued that 'new wars' elude these traditional conceptions: rarely is there a declaration of war (cf. Hallett, 1998), combatants can hardly be distinguished from civilians and seldom is there an identifiable front line in combat. These observations are related to weakening state structures and the emergence of non-state actors (Daase, 1999; Münkler, 2002; van Creveld, 1991). Non-state actors are commonly described as revolutionary, insurgent or separatist movements that challenge the state's authority. But as Erhard Eppler illustrates, non-state actors also originate from positions where their original task had been to keep up the existing order. This is illustrated by numerous paramilitary groups during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, many of whom took part in the war economies and began to develop an interest in the perpetuation of violence. Both kinds of non-state actors, those challenging the authority and those that were part of the established system and developed separate interests, are closely related to the weakening of state structures (Eppler, 2002: 30–43). Monika Heupel and Bernhard Zangl confirm these observations, adding that in Bosnia-Herzegovina at times up to 83 separate combat units existed, ranging from paramilitaries, renegades, foreign mercenaries and local militia to petty criminal bands (Heupel and Zangl, 2004: 350–351). To political theorist Herfried Münkler the phenomenon of *demilitarization* is central to 'new wars': regulars are replaced by renegade units and 'soldiers' become 'warriors', unregulated by any code of conduct in war.⁴ In turn, the war objectives move from military targets to civilians and the infrastructure (Münkler, 2006b: 135). A related subject is the widespread usage of child soldiers in contemporary wars. Estimates suggest that globally up to 300,000 boys and girls below the age of 18 years are being abused as child soldiers. These are among the principal actors in 'new wars' because they are more 'cost-efficient', easier to recruit than regular troops and easier to keep under control, as Paul Russmann explains (2004: 205).

Some authors suggest that 'new wars' are further characterized by an increasing barbarity in the conduct of war. Gruesome cases of massacres among civilian populations in Bosnia, Sierra Leone and the Congo illustrate this (Heupel and Zangl, 2004: 355). Yet, scholars have reached no consensus on the interpretation of this phenomenon. Some present the 'barbarism thesis' in the context of irrational, existential warfare (Holsti, 1996; Kaplan, 2000; van Creveld, 1991). Others regard the increase of violence directed against civilians as part of a rational strategy (Heupel and Zangl, 2004; Kaldor, 1999; Münkler, 2002). Incidents of organized rape have to be included in this context. Violence against women in war has historical precedents, but in contrast to 'old wars', where sexual violence on enemy territory had been largely dysfunctional, a *resexualization* of violence can be observed in 'new wars' (Münkler, 2002: 142–153). Studies documenting the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina confirm this observation (Gow, 2007; Kaser, 2007).

The processes of demilitarization and privatization undermine the efficacy of international law. The *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* were intended to prevent war; or, where that failed, to restrain it through common humanitarian norms and practices as prescribed in the Geneva Conventions and its Additional Protocols (cf. Greenwood, 2008; Herdegen, 2008: 372). International law, however, is founded on the Westphalian conception of

sovereign nation-states that acknowledge each other as principal actors in international politics. This essentially European conception of statehood never fitted on a global scale, leading to an asynchronous development between international law and the reality of the international system. In consequence, 'new wars' largely elude legal frameworks. In wars between states the adversaries recognize each other as 'legitimate' enemies. Wars between states and non-state actors, however, are characterized by reciprocal notions of illegitimacy (Daase, 2001: 137; Münkler, 2006a: 278–279).

The political economy of 'new wars'

Hypothesis 2: (a) 'New wars' are driven by economic aspirations. (b) In contrast to traditional beliefs concerning the causation of wars, political or ideological motivations play only a minor role in 'new wars'. (c) The political economy of 'new wars' reinforces and perpetuates the ongoing violence.⁵

'New wars' ought to be understood primarily from an economic perspective. Contemporary conflicts are, as David Keen puts it in an adaption of the Clausewitzian dictum, 'the continuation of economics by other means' (Keen, 1998: 11). Social scientists, however, have long favoured matters of ideology, religion or ethnicity when it comes to explain the causation of civil wars, thereby neglecting the economic dimension of war which can provide a convincing explanatory variable for the outbreak and duration of military conflicts (Kaldor, 1999: 90–91; Münkler, 2002: 159). Mary Kaldor argues that the political economy of 'new wars' proves the 'irrelevance of traditional perceptions of war', because 'those who conceive of war in traditional Clausewitzian terms, based on definable geo-political goals, fail to understand the underlying vested interests, both political and economic, in the continuation of war' (1999: 90–91).

Since the mid-1990s a number of studies focused on linkages between local conflicts and global war economies, revealing networks of legal and illegal trade, arms and drug trafficking, corrupt governments and supportive diasporas that influence the outbreak and perpetuation of violent conflicts (Duffield, 1994; Jean and Rufin, 1999). Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2004) explore the outbreak of civil conflict using econometric models based on the dichotomy of 'greed' and 'grievance' as potential drivers behind insurgencies. Their finding that the factor 'greed' holds more explanatory power than 'grievance' contrasts with traditional beliefs asserting that insurgencies occur mostly when grievances pass a certain threshold and people begin to engage in violent protest. Collier and Hoeffler use an economic theory approach that models rebellions as industries that generate profit from looting and relates the opportunity for rebellion to the availability of finance (2004: 564). Two vital sources of finance are the export of primary commodities and the existence of a sizable diaspora, which can 'substantially increase the risk of conflict renewal', as Collier and Hoeffler observe (2004: 558).

Kaldor adds that humanitarian assistance can amplify conflicts when actors abuse it as a source of finance, arguing that it 'may merely enhance the legitimacy of the warring parties and allow time for replenishment; humanitarian assistance may contribute to the functioning of the war economy' (1999: 91). For Kaldor it is obvious that the political, social and

economic spheres are strongly intertwined and cannot be regarded separately. Her model on resource flows is based on Duffield (1994) and conceptualizes new war economies as self-perpetuating cycles of violence, criminal behaviour and economic activities:

[w]ar provides a legitimization for various criminal forms of private aggrandizement while at the same time these are necessary sources of revenue in order to sustain the war. The warring parties need more or less permanent conflict both to reproduce their positions of power and for access to resources. (Kaldor, 1999: 104–111)

‘New wars’ as asymmetric wars

Hypothesis 3: ‘New wars’ are characterized by asymmetry. This involves the constellation of (a) actors, (b) military capabilities, (c) the methods of warfare and (d) the politics of war.⁶

An essential characteristic of ‘new wars’ is their mode of warfare: they are *asymmetric* in nature. A plethora of different terms is used to describe this phenomenon: *civil*, *small*, *guerrilla* and *wars of the third kind* are just some of the attributes applied to non-conventional wars (for example, Daase, 1999; Holsti, 1996; Rice, 1988). Most of these terms highlight a single aspect of war — most often the actors or the methods of warfare — but some also carry political connotations as in *revolutionary war*, indicating a politically motivated and thus somewhat more ‘legitimate’ type of war, while *savage war*, on the other hand, conveys notions of ‘uncivilized’ or primordial warfare.

Research on asymmetric conflicts has a long tradition in security studies (for example, Katzenbach and Hanrahan, 1955; Mack, 1975). Most authors, however, focus narrowly on tactical elements of warfare. In contrast, Münkler (2006a) develops the concept of *asymmetry* in a more comprehensive fashion, drawing on political theory and the history of warfare. Asymmetry lends itself as an unbiased umbrella term that covers a range of aspects, being defined in relation to symmetry as the opposite ends on a continuum. Thus, one can speak of *degrees* of asymmetry and symmetry instead of an either/or relation. Asymmetric constellations are given when there is a *qualitative* difference between units of observation, for example concerning armament, training or recruitment methods (Münkler, 2006a: 161–162, 209). Asymmetric constellations of actors can be based on *type*, referring to state or non-state actors, but also based on *capability*. The capability-gap between Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and the rest of the world but also the gap between the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies are well documented (Yost, 2003). This process has been further accelerated by the ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ that set in two decades ago and introduced electronics to most weapons systems (cf. Bacevich, 2006: 166–174; Münkler, 2006a: 154).

The methods of warfare in ‘new wars’ are similar to strategies of guerrilla warfare, the critical difference being that, ‘whereas guerrilla warfare’, at least in theory as articulated by Mao Tse-Tung or Che Guevara, aimed to capture ‘hearts and minds’, the new warfare borrows from counter-insurgency techniques of destabilization aimed at sowing ‘fear and hatred’, as Kaldor argues (1999: 8). This brings to mind Henry Kissinger’s explanation for the outcome of the Vietnam War in which the US:

sought physical attrition; our opponents aimed for our psychological exhaustion. In the process, we lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of guerrilla war: the guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win. (1969: 214)

Münkler sketches three kinds of asymmetric wars in his treatise on ‘new wars’: resource wars, regulatory wars and wars of attrition (2006a: 144–150).⁷ The third type shares characteristics of guerrilla warfare in the sense that it is a strategy of *deceleration*. It is a response of the weak to the technological and economic superiority of its adversary. Outlasting becomes more important than winning military skirmishes, as success comes through psychological exhaustion of the enemy. Münkler holds that Western ‘post-heroic’ societies tend to have a low tolerance for military casualties and economic burdens. Thus, they plan for short and intense conflicts. The longer a war lasts, the higher the probability that a ‘post-heroic’ society will withdraw its troops (Münkler, 2006a: 181–186).

‘New wars’ as identity-based wars

Hypothesis 4: (a) ‘New wars’ are driven by exclusive conceptions of identity, which are being instrumentalized for the purpose of seizing political power. (b) These ‘identity politics’ have to be understood in the context of the erosion of state structures and the insecurities of globalization.⁸

The early 1990s saw the outbreak of violent conflict along ethnic, racial and religious fault lines that quickly shattered the optimism that had set in after the Cold War. In the face of extreme ethnic violence such as the genocide of 800,000 Rwandans and the atrocities committed during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina⁹ it became apparent that scholars had long neglected matters of identity as potential sources of conflict.

The model of ‘new wars’, as Kaldor articulates it, is based on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a conflict that represents a ‘paradigm of the new type of warfare’ as much as it illustrates the inadequacy of traditional conceptions of war (Kaldor, 1999: 31–32). Habitual notions led the international community to believe in the existence of deep-seated ethnic antagonisms in the Balkans, reinforced by the propaganda of nationalist leaders who aimed to escalate the conflict around perceived ‘ancient hatreds’ to pursue their own goals (Melčić, 2007). Outside observers failed to understand the particular dynamics of this war, which became apparent when cases of ‘ethnic cleansing’ were reported: while clear evidence for systematic atrocities existed, it was long overlooked. Civilian casualties were seen as people ‘caught in the crossfire’ and not as the result of systematic targeting (Kaldor, 1999: 58).¹⁰

How can cases of extreme ethnic violence such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina be explained? This question has generated a vast literature. Early approaches, which have been largely discredited by later studies, assumed the existence of ‘ancient hatreds’, regarding ethnicity as an inherent characteristic of individuals or groups that is not subject to change and can be the direct cause of conflict. In this view ethnic heterogeneity makes a country more prone to violent outbreaks (Enzensberger, 1993; Kaplan, 2000; Smith, 1986). The main limitations of this approach are its inability to account for variance in inter-ethnic relations across countries, times of peaceful coexistence and the emergence of new forms of collective identities.

'Instrumentalist' approaches to the study of ethnic war are often based on rational choice theory and some build on neorealist premises about the nature of international relations. Here, ethnicity is seen as a tool that is used to attain a larger, often material objective (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Lake and Rothchild, 1998). In contrast to the 'ancient hatreds' perspective, instrumentalists see ethnicity not as inherently different from other forms of political association, like those based on ideology or interest (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 6). Studies exploring ethnic war from a neorealist perspective transfer the inter-state security dilemma to an ethnic setting and assert that escalation between ethnic groups can be largely attributed to information failures and problems of commitment (Lake and Rothchild, 1998; Posen, 1993). Constructivists criticize rationalists for treating ethnic groups as 'undifferentiated, given units' while neglecting processes of identity-construction and manipulation through elites (Cederman and Daase, 2006: 135). The social-psychological school presents another group of approaches that challenges rationalist accounts of ethnic war (Horowitz, 1985; Kaufman, 2006). Adherents oppose the idea of rationality in the face of extreme behaviour such as genocide and underline the importance of emotional motives to comprehend these conflicts. Stuart Kaufman's approach holds that extreme ethnic violence is based on 'group myths that justify hostility, fears of group extinction, and a symbolic politics of chauvinist mobilization' (Kaufman, 2006: 47).¹¹

To Kaldor, the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is best understood from an instrumentalist perspective, as evidence suggests that ethnic antagonisms were not as deep-seated as commonly believed and were largely instrumentalized for political purposes. What Kaldor terms 'identity politics' has to be seen against the backdrop of eroding state structures and the struggle of elites for political power (1999: 35). 'Identity politics' arise out of conditions as they existed in the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, but also in places like Kashmir and Eritrea. What these cases share is a political leadership with diminishing legitimacy and a growing parallel economy based on corruption and crime. Under these conditions 'identity politics' are used by political elites to stay in power, fill the vacuum left by crumbling state structures with a sense of national identity and provide legitimation for 'shadowy' economic activities (Kaldor, 1999: 78). As to the role ethnicity played in Bosnia-Herzegovina, John Mueller stipulates that it served as an ordering device, but not as 'a crucial motivating force'. To Mueller that particular conflict illustrates what he terms 'criminal warfare' run by 'groups of violent thugs' and coordinated by political leaders who abuse notions of ethnic identity to justify their political and material aims (Mueller, 2004: 88–95). Kaldor shares this instrumentalist notion, arguing, that 'the motivation of the paramilitary groups seems to have been largely economic' (1999: 53).

Terrorism within the framework of 'new wars'

Hypothesis 5: (a) The new forms of international terrorism represent a modern variant of guerrilla warfare. (b) Unlike traditional guerrilla warfare, this new kind of terrorism poses a strategic challenge to Western societies.¹²

Terrorism is an essentially contested concept that lacks an agreed-upon definition in academia as well as in the public sphere, due to its nature as a *political* category and the

legal implications that follow from any definition (Hoffman, 2006; Münkler, 2006a). For the new war thesis terrorism constitutes a conceptual boundary to 'irregular warfare' and 'organized crime', from which it is often difficult to distinguish. Proponents agree that international terrorism is part of a larger complex of phenomena under the umbrella of 'new wars'. However, only a few scholars regard terrorism as a form of warfare (Carr, 1996; Gilbert, 2003; Münkler, 2006a). Those who reject that notion do so on the grounds of legal arguments, because of ethical concerns or because they deem such a classification detrimental to efforts at fighting terrorism (Eppler, 2002; Hoffman, 1997; Preuß, 2003). Christopher Daase argues that there are three guiding questions concerning international terrorism: (1) whether it is a state-based phenomenon or not; (2) whether terrorism constitutes criminal behaviour or an act of warfare; and (3) whether it should be fought with reactive or proactive strategies (Daase, 2002: 126).¹³

Münkler conceptualizes the new form of international terrorism as a *Verwüstungskrieg* (war of attrition) that represents a modern variant of guerrilla warfare, but unlike traditional forms it poses a strategic challenge to Western societies. In this sense the new form of international terrorism is different from the kind of 'ethno-separatist terrorism' as witnessed in Northern Ireland and the Spanish Basque Country (Münkler, 2006a: 19, 240). The new kind of terrorism abandons the three-stage-system of guerrilla warfare as originated by Mao Tse-Tung and modified by Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Where terrorism had formerly been only an element in the larger scheme of guerrilla warfare, it has become an independent strategy (Münkler, 2006a: 236). Earlier forms of terrorism were intended as an intermediate step towards full-scale guerrilla war; a strategy that aimed to hurt representatives of the state and the established order to provoke a response, which would then convince the general public of the alleged legitimacy of the insurgents' cause. In order to achieve this goal, terrorist attacks had to be narrowly focused and avoid casualties among the general public. The conflict ought to be characterized by selectivity on the side of the terrorists and non-selectivity on the side of the state concerning its methods of repression (Münkler, 2006a: 236–237). The new form of international terrorism is an autonomous political strategy that regards its attacks less as an act of provocation than an end in itself. Casualties among the general public are accepted as collateral damage. The terrorists' primary target is the unstable psychological infrastructure of Western 'post-heroic' societies. The secondary target is the economic sphere where damage is inflicted indirectly as a result of the measures 'post-heroic' societies undertake in response to the terrorist threat (Münkler, 2006a: 239–243; 2006b: 147).

Ulrich Preuß rejects the line of argumentation expressed by Münkler. He holds that terrorism, even in its new guise as witnessed during the attacks on 11 September 2001, ought not to be conceptualized in the terminology of war and peace. To Preuß, terrorism remains primarily a criminal activity and should be treated as such regardless of any alleged political goals the terrorists claim for themselves (Preuß, 2003: 78). Eppler follows a similar argumentation. To him there is only the dichotomous relation between a state of war and a state of peace. Whenever something falls in between, then it is best to avoid both terms, as Eppler argues. This is also why he prefers the term 'organized violence' to 'new wars', although he is describing essentially the same phenomena as other authors (Eppler, 2002: 10–12).

Critiques of the new war thesis

The new war proposition initiated a critical discussion on the causes of war and peace and the nature of contemporary warfare, particularly in Germany at a time when the country was debating the use of force and the role of its military in a changed international environment.¹⁴ To a lesser extent this debate was taking place also in Great Britain and across the Atlantic.

Many critics question the validity of the distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ wars, arguing that it establishes an arbitrary dividing line where no fundamental difference exists (Gantzel, 2002; Kalyvas, 2001; Smith, 2003). Henderson and Singer defend the Correlates of War typology, on the grounds that ‘new wars’ are quite similar to what used to be termed ‘low-intensity conflict’ (2002: 165–171). Klaus Schlichte shares the notion that there has not been a fundamental shift in contemporary warfare, adding that the finding of ‘new wars’ is partly due to a Euro-centric and idealized account of history (Schlichte, 2006: 114–116). Sven Chojnacki urges ‘new war’ proponents to defend their argument by presenting a list of measurable criteria and sizable empirical evidence in support of their claims (2006: 48, cf. 2008).

Further criticism aims at the alleged causation of ‘new wars’: an issue on which the proponents themselves have reached no consensus as has been illustrated; some emphasize the importance of economic aspects (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), others see causes in differences of ethnicity, race or religion (cf. Huntington, 1993; Kaplan, 2000). Most authors follow a synthetic approach, with an emphasis on instrumentalist arguments (Eppler, 2002; Kaldor, 1999; Münkler, 2002).

Critics of the political economist argument acknowledge the importance of economic variables when explaining conflict behaviour but oppose what they see as a tendency towards simplification in the ‘greed’ literature (Cramer, 2002; Schlichte, 2006). Schlichte posits that the materialist argument represents the flip side to what culturalists claim: ‘cultural pessimists’ such as Huntington (1993), Enzensberger (1993) and Kaplan (2000) condense negative observations into an apocalyptic vision; political economists, on the other hand, reduce the complexities of war to an economic rationale and leave out the reality of war as a social phenomenon (Schlichte, 2006: 112–117).

Conclusions

The debate about a transformation of war and ‘new wars’ brings together strands of research from political theory, sociology, history, international relations and political economy. This variety of approaches inevitably complicates an evaluation of the state of research on the subject. As a research agenda the new war proposition has successfully drawn attention to salient issues in international politics and introduced aspects of security studies to a wider audience within and outside of academia. Researchers have begun to move beyond the initial question of a transformation of war — which has been answered affirmatively on the grounds of empirical studies — in order to find out *how* this transformation affects the prevalent theoretical models of war, international law, humanitarian interventions and the war convention. As Daase argues (2001), international

regimes fall short of fulfilling their intended role in preventing and mitigating warfare. Herdegen (2008: 375) illustrates steps towards progress in the field of international law concerning new regulations addressing phenomena like asymmetric conflicts between state and non-state actors. However, the problems of comprehensive international ratification and compliance are likely to continue (cf. Fleck, 2008).

International terrorism and questions related to an adequate response remain salient issues in international relations. The argument Münkler (2006a) proposes is currently a minority view. Others reject the notion that terrorism should be regarded as a type of war on the grounds of legal or normative arguments. Whatever one thinks about the issue, it is clear that the distinctions between various kinds and degrees of violence have become increasingly blurred. This calls for a renewed effort to match prevalent theoretical models with the empirical reality of contemporary wars and violent conflict.

Notes

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1. Mary Kaldor (1999) introduced the term ‘new wars’; Martin van Creveld (1991) laid the foundation. Münkler (2002, 2006a) provided a theoretical synthesis.
2. The exceptions are: Eritrea–Ethiopia, 1998–2000; India–Pakistan, 1998–2003; and Iraq versus the USA and its allies, ongoing since 2003 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2008). The conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation of August 2008 was not included in the study.
3. This hypothesis is derived from van Creveld (1991), Daase (1999), and Münkler (2002).
4. Translations from German are the author’s.
5. This hypothesis is derived from Collier and Hoeffler (2004).
6. This hypothesis is derived from Münkler (2006a).
7. Resource wars (*Ressourcenkriege*) operate on dynamics as elaborated on in Hypothesis 2. Regulatory wars (*Pazifizierungskriege*) are conflicts characterized by ‘legitimatory’ asymmetry and initiated by great powers to impose a certain social-political order on peripheral states (Münkler, 2006a: 144–150).
8. This hypothesis is derived from Kaldor (1999).
9. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina lasted from March 1992 till October 1995; it claimed about 150,000 fatal casualties and displaced 2.2 million people (Kaser, 2007: 410).
10. Studies documenting the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina confirm that the warring parties effectively pursued ethnic cleansing, despite efforts to legitimize their objective through rhetoric of self-determination (Gow, 2007: 363; Kaser, 2007: 409).
11. For an exchange of arguments between rationalists and adherents of symbolic politics, see Grigorian and Kaufman (2007).
12. This hypothesis is derived from Münkler (2002, 2006a, b).
13. For an exchange of arguments concerning the classification of terrorism, see Carr (1996) and Hoffman (1997).
14. A collection of critical essays on the German debate is provided in Geis (2006). Rathbun (2004) explores the different debates over peace enforcement in Britain, France and Germany from a constructivist perspective.

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Biographical notes

Patrick A. Mello is a doctoral student at the Berlin Graduate School of Social Sciences at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, completing his dissertation on patterns in the conflict behaviour of contemporary democracies. His research interests include international relations theory and the influence of domestic factors on foreign policy.